

Hugh Parks' AROUND TOWN

An Extraordinary Workshop

Out on Sylvan Road at the Old Farmers' Market in a long, high shed there is a plain-spoken former Central Intelligence agent who runs a workshop staffed by mentally retarded Atlantans.

He is George H. Cole, a tall, black-haired man wearing black horn-rimmed glasses who served in Central Intelligence for 10 years and says he wanted to come home to Atlanta and thus became director of the Bobby Dodd Workshop sponsored by the Atlanta Association for Retarded Children.

In the shed, girls and boys, most of them young, although the admissible ages are 17 to 30, learn to operate automatic dish washers, make salads for cafeterias, fashion bright bows for the packages you will have wrapped at stores this Christmas, stuff envelopes for government offices and do other service type jobs.

The I.Q. of these young people ranges from 50 to 80.

"Our primary function," said Mr. Cole, "is to prepare them to go out into the community instead of sitting home by the TV set. It's good for everyone's morale." He was giving us a tour up the aisle separating the two lines of workers, sitting silently at their various tasks, apparently quite intent on them. There was Mrs. Forest E. Huff and Miss Gussie Jones, both active in behalf of the 30,000 Atlantans, or 3 per cent of the population, who are retarded, and Julian Barfield, bank vice president who is promoting the annual bloodthirsty intra-squad game at Tech Sept. 11. This brings in \$6,000 to \$13,000 a year, depending on the weather, to provide operative funds for the workshop named after Coach Bobby Dodd.

They Are Conscious of Others' Pay

"Part of our work," said Mr. Cole, "is to teach them to apply for a job, how to make a phone call to a businessman, how to take supervision. Of those 45 in the shop now—we can train 60 at a time—there are seven who cannot go into business because of some social defect, their appearance for instance, and are called 'sheltered cases' and will remain in the shop. We pay them according to the amount of work they do and it is an incentive-type thing, which is good."

"It is not unusual for one to want to know why the person next to him is making more and we tell him because he works harder, when that's true."

A brown-haired little girl in blue gingham dress was concentrating on counting their money bags. We passed on to where two nice-looking



boys in goggles were repairing and painting damaged soft drink crates.

"They wear goggles because when they pry off a cracked slat a nail could fly out," explained Mr. Cole.

We went into another long, ex-market shed which had been fixed up so that it is a whole house. It was spotless. There was a kitchen with the latest equipment, a living room, bedroom, bath, all carefully furnished.

"Girls are taught here," said Mr. Cole. "How to prepare small meals, how to use a vacuum cleaner, make up beds, set the table and personal hygiene."

Next to the model home was a duplicate of a service station, run by Sam Guthrie, a husky young man who learned that trade in the Air Force. Mr. Guthrie teaches boys how to gas cars, wash them, check the oil, and some are even taught to tune engines and reline brakes.

"I had one boy who removed an engine, tore it down and put it back," he said. He was alone at the moment. "We have just about placed ourselves out of business," he declared ruefully. "They've all gone on to jobs."

Employers Aren't Always Told

"We've got one boy working for the federal government stuffing envelopes," said Mr. Cole, "who is making \$4,500 a year. A cafeteria, which hires a number of our graduates—they are here from three months to a year depending on the individual—says they are more punctual and more conscientious than other workers. We teach them to punch a timeclock.

"So far as we know there's no cruel 'hazing' by other employes. In fact, they probably don't know our youngsters' background. Mental retardation is something certainly no one can help and no stigma is attached to it by anyone of intelligence. The brains of many were damaged at birth or later. There was one boy hit in the head by shell fragments in Korea who regressed 10 to 15 years."

"Sometimes the employers themselves don't even know. I'll see a want ad for a position I think one of our people can fill and as director of a training center I'll call up and make a recommendation without elaborating. Or they'll call up on their own."

The workshop's bulletin board often carries articles about the mentally retarded.

"How do they feel about that?" I asked, "seeing 'mentally retarded'?"

Mrs. Huff, assistant director of the fund drive, spoke up earnestly, "I would like some day to hear them called 'intellectually limited'."

"You have to talk direct," put in Mr. Cole. "This is something we have to tell their parents. They bring their children here thinking that tomorrow morning they'll be changed. But there isn't going to be any miracle tomorrow or the next day. You can't pussyfoot. But we can get them away from the house and trouble-making boredom so they can make their living or at least pay rent and board at home. They can have pride in what they do. They have scraps and little love triangles like everybody else."

He glanced at the bulletin board. "One boy went up there and read 'mentally retarded' and asked me what it meant, and I told him. He said, 'I may be stupid but I'm not mental retardate.' I said, 'That's good and say, 'Our boys and girls may be mentally retarded but they aren't stupid.'"